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Highly Enriched Uranium Repatriated from Latvia

Fuel Returned to Secure Facility in Russia in 7th Successful Mission

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Three kilograms of highly enriched uranium (HEU) that could be used for nuclear weapons were safely returned to the Russian Federation from Latvia under the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) in a mission completed on May 25. The mission was a joint effort between the United States, Latvia, Russia, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"The recovery, return and eventual elimination of highly enriched uranium is an important component of the administration's Global Threat Reduction Initiative campaign to reduce the threat posed by dangerous nuclear and radiological material worldwide," said NNSA Administrator Linton F. Brooks. "We applaud the strong leadership of Latvia for taking measures to secure this material and working cooperatively with the United States, Russia and the IAEA to successfully return it to Russia."

The highly enriched uranium was airlifted under guard from an airport near Riga, Latvia, to a secure facility, NPO Luch, in Podol'sk, Russia. There, the highly enriched uranium will be down-blended to low enriched uranium.

The nuclear fuel was originally supplied to Latvia by the Soviet Union for use in the Soviet-designed research reactor, located in Salaspils near the Latvian capital, Riga. In 1997, NNSA and the Latvia Nuclear Research Center completed a joint project to upgrade security of the nuclear material at Salaspils until it could be returned to Russia.

During the one-day mission, the HEU was loaded into two specialized transportation containers. IAEA safeguards inspectors and NNSA technical experts were present in Salaspils to monitor the process of loading the fuel into canisters. The facility in Russia that received the material has worked closely with the NNSA to implement security upgrades.

The mission of the GTRI is to identify, secure, recover and/or facilitate the final disposition of high-risk vulnerable nuclear and radiological materials around the world as quickly as possible.

This is the seventh successful shipment of HEU being returned to Russia. In the past two years, NNSA has repatriated a total of 57 kg of HEU to Russia from Romania, Bulgaria, Libya, Uzbekistan, and Czech Republic. In August 2002, 48 kg of Russian-origin HEU were repatriated from a research reactor near Belgrade, Serbia.

NNSA enhances U.S. national security through the military application of nuclear energy, maintains the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile, promotes international nuclear nonproliferation and safety, reduces global danger from weapons on mass destruction, provides the U.S. Navy with safe and effective nuclear propulsion, and oversees its national laboratories to maintain U.S. leadership in science technology.

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